

## Looking Back: Pioneers In Duxbury's

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

Today finding a real estate agency in Duxbury is easy - just stop at any business center or busy corner and there's sure to be at least one, if not several. It seems all the more



remarkable then to look back to the beginning of this century and find just one major Realtor in town, and only a handful until the early 1970s.

The first Realtor who most residents recall is Percy Walker or "Mr. Duxbury," as he was commonly known during his lifetime. For 39 years, Walker enjoyed little if no competi-

tion-- a Realtor's dream. Eventually, others came on the scene including entrepreneurial-minded women, like Barbara Mallowney and Joanne Patterson.

**Percy didn't just sell houses, he sold Duxbury -- its history, and most importantly to Percy, its rural nature.**

Although most consider Percy Walker Realty to be the first real estate agency in town, there were a few other one-man businesses prior to Walker's entry into the industry in 1909. "My father bought a real estate office on Washington Street from a man named Cushman ...it wasn't much of a real estate business, just a few signs," said his son Chuck Walker.

Soon after, Percy moved the office to his home near the intersection of Tremont and

West Street. It would become a family dynasty, surviving an every changing community.

"I don't believe there is any real estate agency this old on the South Shore," said Chuck Walker, who continues to sell real estate part-time from his family's original homestead, now the offices of Century 21 Walker Brothers owned by Doris and John Kolstad.

Percy was hard working and "doggedly kept at people...he didn't let any water run over the dam which is why he sold a very large percent of houses during his time," his son said.

When Percy showed a house, "out came the biggest collection of keys in town," noted John Cutler, in his book *Put It On The Front*



Chuck Walker shows old photos of every house listed and sold by Percy Walker Realty.

*Page, Please!* Using a horse and buggy he took prospective clients around town showing them properties, and in the winter he hitched the horse up to a sleigh. He never let any obstacle stand in his way of making a sale. During one winter showing, Percy actually "pulled the sleigh himself because the horse wouldn't cooperate," said Chuck Walker.

He was good at focusing his client's attention on the positive aspects of a property, said Cutler. "While a client probed a sagging sill, Percy would walk over to a soapstone sink, turn on a faucet, and say "Nothing like good old Duxbury water," Cutler wrote. Percy didn't just sell houses, he sold Duxbury—its history, and most importantly to Percy, its rural nature.

He promoted the town's rural character through his involvement with the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society both during his brother's presidency from 1893 to 1899, and his own seven-year presidency beginning in 1949.



Percy Walker

Percy was involved in town government and politics. Many considered him to be a "mover and a shaker." His dedication and love for the town may explain how this legend got his nickname, 'Mr. Duxbury.'

The town water system we benefit from today is due largely to the efforts of Percy Walker. In 1914, Walker initiated a campaign for a town water system after receiving many complaints from residents whose windmill run water pumps failed when the

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winds died down. Walker, having sold many of these properties, set out to solve the problem by advocating a town water system.

During World War II, Percy Walker addressed the town's transportation problem by getting the town to appropriate \$900 for a bus service from Duxbury to Kingston. "This was a necessary thing because

**"When I started selling real estate Duxbury had a population of 6500 people, and the prices of homes were also only a tenth of what they are today," said Patterson.**

during the war there were gas rations and you couldn't drive your car very much," said Walker.

Percy Walker's most notable accomplishments came from his work on the planning board, which he joined in 1942. "Percy built the planning board into an effective means of regulating growth in town, thus maintaining Duxbury's rural

game in town when it came to buying or selling a house. "There was only one other fellow selling real estate, Sidney Soule, and he wasn't much competition," Walker recalled. In 1958, a partnership formed between Percy Walker's sons and the office took the name Walker Brothers.

By the early 1950s, several others had started real estate offices. Barbara Mallowney, known as "Ms. Real Estate," was the first female to start her own real estate office in Duxbury, said broker Kiki Houghton.

Houghton, currently with Duxbury Homes, recalled working for Mallowney when she first started selling real estate. "Mallowney got her real estate license in the late 1940s...when you only needed to send in a check, there was no exam," said Houghton.

After obtaining her license, she went to see Percy Walker in the hopes of getting a job in his office, recalled Houghton. "Percy told her, 'you don't want to work for me, Barbara, why don't you start your own real estate business,' and that's exactly what she did," laughed Houghton. He actually created



A relic of Percy Walker days. From left to right, Chuck Walker and owners Doris and John Kolstad.

said Paterson.

The biggest change in Duxbury's real estate business came in the 1970s when Jack Conway came into town, said Patterson. "They were a big office and different than the others in operation at the time," she said.

Jack Conway Realty already had a "real presence on the

changed considerably since the days of Percy Walker, Mallowney and Patterson. It was easier for realtors to do business back then. "When I did real estate, we didn't have all the laws they have today, there was no Title 5," Patterson said.

"Prior to 1962 you didn't need a license to do real

in each office.

"Now it's a numbers game and there is management and people under management who are doing the active producing...its quite different now than it was back then," said Chuck Walker.

Both Walker and Patterson agree the biggest change to hit Duxbury's real estate market is



charm and non-commercial atmosphere," wrote Jack Post in *The Duxbury Book*.

Cutler described Percy Walker as having a wry humor and uncommon common sense which helped "settle many a thorny issue at town meetings."

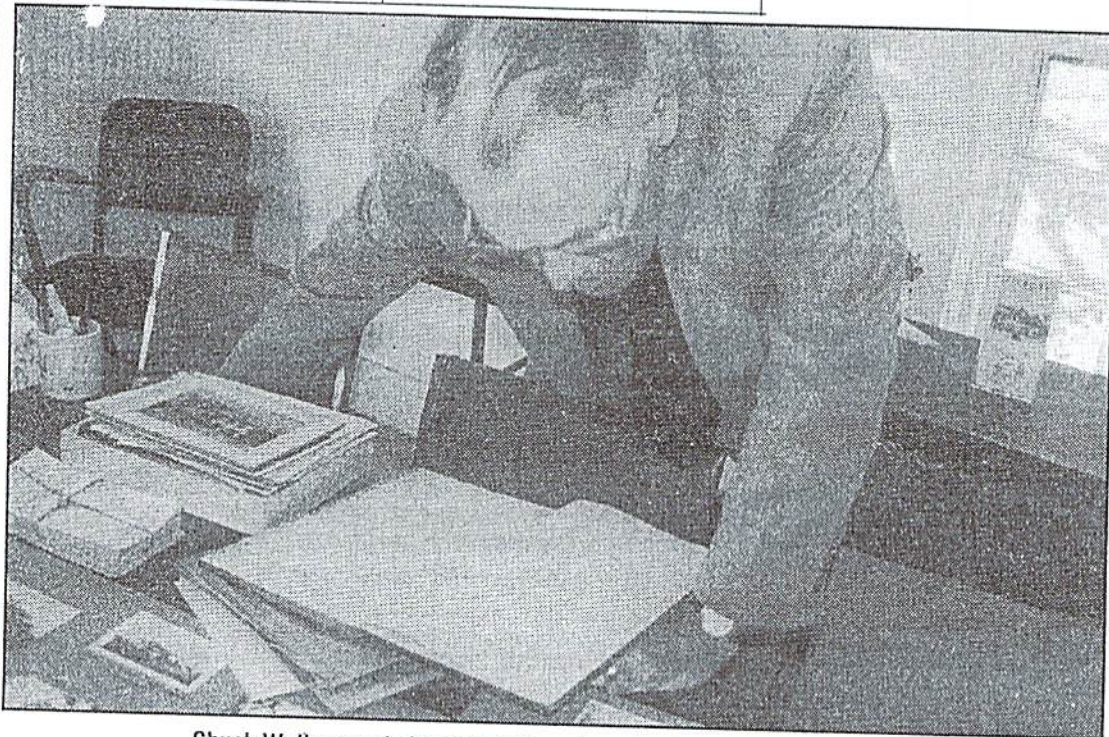
"He was a prime mover for zoning in Duxbury," said Chuck Walker. Although he made his living from selling houses, Walker's priority was protecting Duxbury from being swallowed up by small waterfront subdivisions. In 1944, the town enacted its first zoning law, changing the square foot lot requirement from 20,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet, and latter in 1953 to 40,000 square feet, noted Chuck Walker.

Until 1948, Percy Walker Realty was basically the only

his own competition with his advice, and Mullowney went on to become a very successful Realtor in town.

Other successful female Realtors pursued their own offices in Duxbury. Joanne Paterson, obtained her license in 1961, and in 1962, went to work for Fuller Marshall, another one-man real estate office located at Snug Harbor.

After a few years working for Marshall, Paterson decided to go it alone and opened her office, Harbor Realty, with a staff of one realtor named Fannie Churchill. "There were only a few people in the real estate business in those days, they were Donna Doyle, Chuck and Donald Walker with Betty Hutton, Barbara Mullowney, myself, and Fuller Marshall,



Chuck Walker reads his father Percy's real estate docket from 1918.





## WALKER BROS.

Realtors

A CHARMING OLD DUXBURY HOME, built in the early 1800's. Attractive light living room, large dining room, modern kitchen, den, first floor lavatory with built-in vanity. Four bedrooms and modern ceramic tile bath upstairs. Four fireplaces, native pine floors, freshly painted and decorated in excellent taste. Utility room (heated); gas forced hot air heat; excellent condition. Conveniently located, \$28,000. Shown by appointment only.

MODERN COLONIAL — Waterview and deeded shore rights. Large fireplaced living room, dining room, study, modern kitchen with adjacent lavatory, 3 bedrooms and modern bath upstairs. The fireplace in basement is ideal for Whoopee Room. Forced hot water heat. Large 2-car garage connects to house by breezeway. Insulated. Attractive rustic lot. Perfect condition. \$37,500. Shown by appointment.

Duxbury, Mass.

WE 4-2500

A 1951 real estate advertisement from the *Clipper*.

South Shore" by the time it came to Duxbury in 1975, noted Jack Conway. In 1957, he started his first office in Hingham, quickly adding additional offices in Cohasset and Scituate, then Marshfield before penetrating into the Duxbury market.

The real estate industry has

estate...anyone could wake up in the morning and decide to sell real estate," said Chuck Walker.

Buyers didn't need be pre-approved for loans. "Once you had a sale, you simply called Henry Pierce, who was the president of Merchants Cooperative Bank and lived in Duxbury, and told him over the phone that you had a house under agreement and you needed a loan of [say] \$60,000," recalled Patterson.

Realtors did have pest inspections, however, and "we did recommend to buyers to have an engineer inspect the house, but that was about it," said Patterson.

Realtors also didn't have access to today's technology. "There was no MLS back then, basically if you had a house for sale you first tried to find a buyer yourself, and if you didn't have anyone then you called around to the other realtors," said Patterson. The real estate offices were also very small compared to today, with maybe only 3 or 4 people

selling prices of properties. Patterson said when he started selling real estate Duxbury had a population of 6500 people, and the prices of homes were also only a tenth of what they are today.

Many of the real estate advertisements found in the *Duxbury Clipper's* archives showed selling prices of \$8,500 and \$12,000 in 1950. Patterson

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recalled the inventory of houses for sale in Duxbury was about 50 homes "at any given time" with prices in the range of \$50,000 and the top-selling price at \$300,000 during her years.

"Percy would be very surprised if he could come back today and see what things are going for," laughed Chuck Walker. And he would definitely be selling properties in Duxbury, only with a four-wheel drive and not his stubborn horse and buggy.